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# THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

DECEMBER 1st, 1855.

## PAGANINI.

*Translated from Hector Berlioz's Soirées de l'Orchestre,*

By SABILLA NOVELLO.

A VERY talented man, Choron, in speaking of Weber, said, "He is a meteor!" With equal justice we may say of Paganini, "He is a comet!" for never did a lustrous star appear more unexpectedly in the sphere of art, and, in the course of its immense ellipse, excite wonder tinged with a sort of terror, before disappearing for ever. The comets of the physical world, if we may believe poets and popular fancies, appear only in times precursory of terrible scourges which agitate the ocean of humanity. Certainly, neither the present epoch nor Paganini's apparition would contradict tradition to this effect. This extraordinary genius, unique in his peculiar art, was developed in Italy at the commencement of the grandest occurrences recorded in history; he began his career at the Court of one of Napoleon's sisters, at the culminating point of the Empire; he triumphantly progressed through Germany at the time the giant Bonaparte was sinking into his tomb; he appeared in France to the crashing sound of a falling dynasty, and entered Paris simultaneously with the cholera. The terror inspired by this pestilence was insufficient to restrain the impulse of curiosity and of enthusiasm which attracted crowds wherever Paganini performed. We can scarcely credit such emotion produced by an artist at such a moment, but the fact is undeniable. Paganini, by impressing the hearts and imaginations of the Parisians thus violently and singularly, caused them to forget even the death which hovered over them. All concurred to increase his fascination: his strange and fantastic exterior, the mystery which enveloped his life, the stories related about him, even the crimes of which he was accused by the stupid audacity of his enemies, and the miracles of a talent which uprooted all received ideas, disdained all known methods—undertook and performed impossibilities.

Paganini's irresistible influence was felt not only by the generality of amateurs and artistes; even the princes of art themselves submitted to it. It is said that Rossini, the arch railer at enthusiasm, felt for him a sort of passion mixed with fear; Meyerbeer, during Paganini's travels through the North of Europe, followed him step by step, ever desirous of hearing him again, and uselessly endeavouring to penetrate the mystery of his phenomenal talent. Unfortunately, I know

only by hearsay of Paganini's immeasurable musical powers; a succession of adverse circumstances willed that he should never have performed in France when I was in that country, and I have the sorrow to avow that, notwithstanding the constant intimacy I had the pleasure of enjoying with him during the latter years of his life, *I have never heard him*. Only once, after my return from Italy, did he play at the Opera, and, confined to bed by violent illness, I was unable to attend this concert, the last, if I mistake not, of all those he gave. After this occasion, the larynx disease of which he ultimately died, joined to a nervous illness which left him no repose, became more and more serious, and he was obliged to renounce all exercise of his art. But as he passionately loved music, which to him was a real want, sometimes, during rare intervals of respite from suffering, he resumed his violin and played Beethoven trios or quartets, organised on the spur of the moment in private committee, the executants being the only auditors. At other times, when the violin fatigued him too much, he drew forth from his portfolio a collection of duetts composed by him for violin and guitar (a collection unknown to all), and taking as coadjutor a worthy German violinist, Mr. Sina, who is still a professor in Paris, he undertook the guitar part, and produced wonderful effects on this instrument. The two players, Sina, the modest violinist, and Paganini, the incomparable guitarist, thus *tête-à-tête* passed long evenings, to which none, even the most worthy, ever gained admittance.

At length, his larynx consumption made such progress that he entirely lost his voice, and from thenceforth he was obliged to renounce nearly all social intercourse. It was difficult, even by placing the ear close to his mouth, to distinguish some few of his words; and when I occasionally took a walk with him in Paris on the days when the sun invited him out, I had an album and pencil; Paganini wrote in a few words the subject on which he willed the conversation should turn; I developed it to the best of my powers, and from time to time, resuming the pencil, he would interrupt me by reflections often extremely original in their laconicism. Beethoven, when deaf, used an album to receive the thoughts of his friends; Paganini, when dumb, employed one in order to transmit his own thoughts to friends. Some one of those persons who collect autographs *by all means*, and who haunt the drawing-rooms of artistes, has, without doubt, *borrowed* without informing me the book which served my illustrious companion: it is certain that I could not find it when Spontini one day desired to see it; and even since, my researches have been equally fruitless.

I have often been solicited to relate, in all its details, the episode of Paganini's life, in which

he acted so cordially magnificent a part with regard to myself. The various incidents (so unusual in the life of an artist) which preceded and followed the principal fact, known at present by all, would really, I believe, be highly interesting; but it will easily be conceived that I should feel much embarrassment in narrating the events, and therefore I must be excused for being silent. I do not even consider it necessary to mention the foolish insinuations, the mad contradictions and erroneous assertions, to which Paganini's noble conduct, in the circumstances I have alluded to, gave rise. As a compensation, certain other critics took the opportunity of offering highest praise: never did the prose of Jules Janin rise to such magnificent forms as on this occasion. The Italian poet Romani also wrote, at a later period, some eloquent pages in the *Gazette Piémontaise*, which much affected Paganini when he read them in Marseilles. He had been obliged to quit Paris, on account of its climate; soon after his arrival in Marseilles, that of Provence appearing to him also too ungenial, he determined to winter in Nice, where he was received in a becoming manner, and surrounded with the most cordial care by a rich musical amateur, a violin-player himself, Count Cessole. His sufferings, however, continued to increase, and, although not fancying himself in danger of death, his letters betray profound dejection. "If God permits it," he wrote to me, "I shall see you again next Spring. I hope my health may improve here: hope is the last blessing which remains to us. Adieu! love me as I love you." I never saw him again! . . .

Some years after, I was myself obliged to seek the refreshment of soft breezes from the Sardinian sea, after the heavy labours of a fatiguing musical season in Paris. One day, I was returning in a boat from Villafranca to Nice, when the young fisherman who rowed me, suddenly letting his oars drop, showed me on the shore a little isolated villa, of rather a singular appearance. "Have you heard speak of a gentleman," said he, "who was called Paganini, and who *sounded* the violin so well?" "Yes, my lad, I have heard him mentioned." "Well, sir, there it is that he staid during three weeks after his death." It appears, in fact, that his body was placed in this pavilion during the long dispute which occurred between his son and the Bishop of Genoa—a dispute which, for the honor of the Genoese and Piedmontese clergy, ought not to have been thus prolonged, and the causes of which, even when viewed by the severest orthodox light, were not so important as was endeavoured to be proved, for Paganini died almost suddenly.

The night following this excursion to Villafranca, I was asleep in the tower of the Ponchettes, fastened, like the nest of a swallow, against a rock 200 feet above the sea, when the tones of

a violin, playing Paganini's variations on the *Carnival of Venice*, reached up my retreat, appearing to issue from the waves. I was just dreaming of him whose villa-mausoleum had been pointed out to me by the fisher-boy: I woke suddenly—I listened some time with a palpitating heart—my ideas became more confused, instead of clearer. The *Carnival of Venice*!—who, excepting himself, could know these variations? Is it an adieu he sends me from another world?—Suppose Theodor Hoffmann in my situation; what a touching and fantastic elegy would he have written on this odd incident! It was Count Cessole, who, alone at the foot of the rock, gave me this charming serenade. These famous variations on a Venetian air are among those works by Paganini which Schönerberger has lately published: I think I ought here to mention that those of Ernst on the same theme, which he has been accused of imitating from Paganini's, do not in the least resemble them. Among other works of this master which the French publisher has just given to the craving curiosity of artistes, it is to be regretted that we do not find the fantasia of the Prayer in *Mosè*, one of the pieces, it is said, in which Paganini produced the profoundest impression. Doubtless, M. Achille Paganini intends it to appear soon in a complete edition of his father's works—an edition which he was right, in some respects, not to publish prematurely, for, notwithstanding the rapid progress made (thanks to Paganini) at the present time in mechanical proficiency on the violin, such compositions are still inaccessible to most violinists, and it is difficult, in reading them, to comprehend how their author could ever execute them.

A volume might be written in telling all that Paganini has created in his works of novel effects, ingenious contrivances, noble and grandiose forms, orchestral combinations unknown before his time.\* His melodies are broad Italian melodies, but full of a passionate ardour seldom found in the best pages of dramatic composers of his country. His harmonies are always clear, simple, and of an extraordinary sonorousness. He has known how to render distinct and dominating the tones of a solo violin by tuning its four chords a semitone above those of the orchestra; which enabled him to play in the brilliant keys of D and A, while the orchestra accompanied him in the less sonorous keys of E $\flat$  and B $\flat$ . What he has discovered in the employment of simple and double harmonic tones, left-hand pizzicato notes, arpeggios, use of the bow, triple-

\* This has been done by Carl Guhr, a German violinist. His work has been translated into English, and forms one of "Novello's Library for the Diffusion of Musical Knowledge," Practical Series, No. II., under the title of "On Paganini's Art of Playing the Violin (an appendix to all other violin schools which have as yet appeared), with a treatise on single and double harmonic tones. Dedicated to the heroes of violin-playing, Rode, Kreutzer, Baillot, and Spohr, by Carl Guhr, Chapel Master and Director of the Theatre in Frankfort-on-the-Maine." Novello, London.

string passages, passes all belief; the more so, because his predecessors had not even prepared the way.

Paganini is one of those artistes of whom we must say, they exist because they exist, and not because others existed before them. Unfortunately, that which he has not been able to transmit to his successors, is the spark which animated and rendered sympathetic these astounding prodigies of mechanism. An idea is written, a form is designed, but the sentiment of execution cannot be fixed: it is unseizable; it is genius, soul, the flame of life, which in dying out leaves behind it darkness, profound in proportion to its brilliancy. For this reason it is, that not only the works of great inventive performers lose more or less by not being executed by the authors, but that also the productions of great original and expressive composers retain but a part of their power when the author does not preside at their performance.

Paganini's orchestration is brilliant and energetic, without being noisy. He often introduces the large drum into his *tutti* with unusual intelligence; in the Prayer of *Mosè*, Rossini has employed it throughout to beat simply on accented divisions of the measure: Paganini, in composing his fantasia on the same theme, has taken care not to imitate him in this point. At the commencement of the melody

*"Dal tuo stellato soglio,"*

Rossini has a beat on the penultimate syllable which is on an accented division; but Paganini, considering the accentuation of the melody (falling on the last syllable) to be incomparably more important, introduces the drum on the weak division in which it occurs; and the effect produced by this alteration is, in my opinion, much better and more original. One day, after complimenting Paganini upon this composition, some one added, "It must be owned that Rossini furnished you a very beautiful theme." "That's all very true," replied Paganini; "but he didn't invent my bang of the great drum."

It would be very difficult for me to continue the analysis of this phenomenon-artist's works—works of inspiration, in which principally we may trace the written manifestation of his miraculous abilities as a performer. Besides which, the recollections I have awakened.... "And you have never heard him?" asked Corsino. "Never."—Adieu, my friends.

## MUSIC

### AMONG THE POETS AND POETICAL WRITERS.

By MARY COWDEN CLARKE.

(Continued from page 126.)

GREAT things have been said of the Sea's music.

"Two Voices are there; one is of the sea,

One of the mountains; each a mighty Voice:

In both from age to age thou didst rejoice,

They were thy chosen music, Liberty!"

*Wordsworth.*

"Silent, and steadfast as the vaulted sky,  
The boundless plain of waters seems to lie :—  
Comes that low sound from breezes rustling o'er  
The grass-crowned headland that conceals the shore?  
No; 'tis the earth-voice of the mighty sea,  
Whispering how meek and gentle he can be!"

*Wordsworth.*

"All noises by degrees  
Were hush'd,—the fisher's call, the birds, the trees,  
All but the washing of the eternal seas."

*Leigh Hunt.*

"He scarce had finish'd, when such murmur fill'd  
The assembly, as when hollow rocks retain  
The sound of blustering winds, which all night long  
Had roused the sea, now with hoarse cadence lull  
Seafaring men o'er-watch'd, whose bark by chance  
Or pinnacle anchors in a craggy bay  
After the tempest."—*Milton.*

"The strange music of the waves,  
Beating on these hollow caves."—*Wither.*

"The murmuring surge,  
That on the unnumbered idle pebbles chafes."  
*Shakespeare.*

"The moanings of the homeless sea."—*Tennyson.*

"The ocean with its vastness, its blue green,  
Its ships, its rocks, its caves, its hopes, its fears,—  
Its voice mysterious, which whose hears  
Must think on what will be, and what has been."  
*Keats.*

"There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,  
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,  
There is society, when none intrudes,  
By the deep sea, and music in its roar."—*Byron.*

"Loud from its rocky caverns, the deep-voiced neighbouring ocean  
Speaks, and in accents disconsolate answers the wail of the forest."—*Longfellow.*

"Thou art sounding on, thou mighty sea, for ever and the same!  
The ancient rocks yet ring to thee, whose thunders nought can tame.  
The Dorian flute, that sighed of yore along thy wave, is still;  
The harp of Judah peals no more on Zion's awful hill.  
And Memnon's, too, hath lost the chord that breath'd the mystic tone;  
And the songs at Rome's high triumphs poured are with her eagles flown;  
And mute the Moorish horn, that rang o'er stream and mountain free,  
And the hymn the learned Crusaders sang hath died in Galilee.  
But thou art swelling on, thou deep, through many an olden clime,  
Thy billowy anthem ne'er to sleep until the close of Time!"  
*Mrs. Hemans.*